

Black History Month February 2001

Creating and Defining the African-American Community: Family, Church, Politics, and Culture

Leon Blankenship

Leon Blankenship grew up near Saline, Louisiana, where his parents owned a 600-acre farm. Both parents were public school teachers. All six of the children attended college; only Leon chose agriculture as a career. He attended Tuskegee University before being drafted into the Army. After the war he returned to Tuskegee to obtain his degree in agriculture. He was in his second year of teaching vocational agriculture in Bernice, Louisiana, when he was offered the job of unit conservationist with the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) at Grambling College.

When Blankenship took the job in January 1951, he had two technicians and a clerk to assist him in working a six-parish area around Grambling. He received most of his training from SCS technicians and other personnel who traveled in and out of the area.

In addition to assisting farmers with the technical aspects of conservation, Blankenship helped them apply for cost-sharing assistance. When Blankenship went to work, many minorities in the area had not heard of the Soil Conservation Service. He began holding night meetings to acquaint farmers with SCS and the technical assistance available to them on the land.

Later in Blankenship's career, he was in the state office in Alexandria, Louisiana, and was responsible for increasing minority participation in programs. He stressed that actively seeking out minorities had to be a part of the job requirement of the district conservationist if progress was to be made.

This information is provided by the Black Emphasis Program in Louisiana. For more information, contact Wanda Simmons, Black Emphasis Program Manager, at (318) 387-8683, ext. 1